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THE PERMANENT UNITY
OF
THE EMPIRE.

BY
FRANCIS PETER LABILLIERE,

BARRISTER-AT LAW.

*A Paper read at a Meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute
on the 19th of January, 1875.*

UNWIN BROTHERS, PRINTERS,
LONDON AND CHILWORTH.

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THE PERMANENT UNITY OF THE EMPIRE.

BY FRANCIS P. LABILLIERE.

THOSE who watch with interest the rapidly changing conditions of the relations between England and her Colonies, must be struck with the progress made within five or six years in what is popularly known as the Colonial, but should more correctly be called the Imperial, question. Within the period mentioned that question has been much more frequently discussed than ever it was before, and has occupied a larger share of the serious attention of intelligent men: many doubts have been cleared up; what the question really means is becoming more generally understood; and the official tone of the Imperial Government towards the Colonies has changed from ungenial politeness to decided heartiness.

The Imperial question practically resolves itself into two heads of inquiry: 1st. Is it desirable that the Empire shall remain permanently united; and if so, 2nd, what must be the ultimate bond of political union—the form of Government which is to weld it into one great power?

With regard to the first, nothing is more calculated to excite the amazement of foreigners, who admire the Empire of England and envy her its possession, than that any Englishman should counsel, or even tacitly countenance, any policy tending to its disintegration.

Is there a German who loves his country, from Prince Bismarck down to the most insignificant politician, who would not give much, and strive hard, to make the new German Empire like our British Empire, which some Englishmen think should be allowed to fall to pieces? Though but few hold such an opinion, the maxim is too true of the nation, that we do not adequately appreciate what we possess.

A few years ago an attempt was made to form a school, to teach in the name of superior wisdom that our soundest policy is one which, within a generation or two, would reduce the great British Empire to the limits of these little islands. These teachers started with Adam Smith's description of the unsound Colonial policy of the past; and, seemingly, were so scared by that old and unwise system as not to be content with its abandonment, but they would have run off so far from it as to carry newer and wiser principles to lengths equally unsound. Our grandfathers having done unwise things, we are told to show how much more sensible we are by rushing into the opposite extreme; they having by a most fallacious policy bound and shackled the Colonies, we should embrace the opposite fallacy, and sever every tie connecting them with England.

The Disunionist school has made but little way since its master, Professor Goldwin Smith, propounded his theses some dozen years ago. Since he wrote, events have belied his anticipations. His case is weaker now than it even was when first stated. The expense of the Colonies to this country has been greatly reduced; twelve years' growth has been added to their strength, to their ability to defend themselves, to the weight they could contribute to the power of a consolidated Empire; wisely or unwisely, British troops have been withdrawn from the Colonies; happily Canada has ceased to be a probable, and has become only a remotely possible, source of danger to this country. We have entered on an era of amity with the United States; and France, the only other nation that could possibly have assailed England in what we are told is her weakest point—her Colonies—has no longer the power even had she the will to do so. The unworthy fears with which Professor Smith tried to frighten England, ingloriously to abandon her Colonial Empire, have become more unreal, and its continued growth and development must still more palpably prove them to have been baseless.

But if fear will not prevail with England, perhaps avarice may; so, in the name of economy, she is told to rid herself of her splendid heritage. The Empire does not "pay," and it is not worth having if its profits and advantages cannot be clearly demonstrated upon balance-sheets: no indirect claims of advantage can be admitted;

* Mr. Hamilton, in his paper read before the Statistical Society, gives a table, which shows that the cost in 1870 and 1871, the two lowest years, was £1,319,439 and £1,045,212 respectively, and in 1884, the highest, £3,140,173. He also proves that in nineteen years, from 1863 to 1871, the Imperial revenues derived from the Colonial trade was £45,000,000; and the Imperial expenditure only £43,000,000.

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nothing that cannot be computed in pounds, shillings, and pence. But to meet this so-called argument of economy upon its own low level: even were the cost of the Colonies to England a few hundred thousand pounds a year, till they become able to bear the whole expense of their own defence, would not their independence at once increase the expenditure of this country in time of peace, there being no greater certainty of the cost and danger of war being lessened to her? Would she not have to pay ministers and consuls where she now sends governors at no cost whatever? Would she not have to maintain war-vessels to protect her commerce just as at present; but with the additional expense of having to form and keep up fortified harbours and coaling stations, now provided for her by the Colonies, whose ports are as much hers in time of peace, and would be as exclusively hers in war—as hostile to her foes—as if situated in the United Kingdom? Are not such advantages capable of computation in a good round sum of money? Were it necessary to do so, would it not even be wise in England to spend for the next few years more than she does upon Colonial defences, if afterwards the Colonies, when more populous and powerful, would contribute their due proportion to the joint defence of the Empire? Those economists who for the sake of saving would get rid of the Colonial Empire, always remind me of the illustrious Mr. Paterfamilias, whose better half, and wiser half, is described as complaining that her husband's savings were always so terribly expensive.

Those who counsel disintegration, put their case in another equally unattractive aspect. They entirely agree with those who think it was wise of England to found Colonies, and to keep them till they have passed a certain stage of infancy; but when the time comes that she can trade with them just as well if independent, the sooner they separate from her the better: as to their being people of her own blood and language, as to their union with her adding to her prestige, it is all sentiment; we ought to be superior to such moonshine. The only true standard of value is money, the light to see everything in is the colour of gold, the glitter of guineas. We have only to state this so-called economical argument in plain English to make it self-repellant. England will never become such a nation of shopkeepers, in the worst sense of the term, as to be utterly regardless of the great moral and material advantages she may derive from preserving in union with herself the whole of that Empire at the head of which Providence has placed her. Should the Decline and Fall of the British Empire have to be recorded by some future Gibbon, shall it be told to our

perpetual shame that such a catastrophe was occasioned by a petty, peddling, penny-wise, pound-foolish policy?

But let us see if the advocates of the unity of the Empire have not the principles of true economy on their side. We have already seen that for England the independence of the Colonies would permanently occasion expenses not at present existing, and would not insure her the certainty that wars would be of less danger and cost to her. The expenses of the Colonies, too, would be augmented by separation. They would have to organise a costly diplomatic and consular service, to largely increase their land and sea defences, to endeavour to create navies, unless they were content to trust for safety to their insignificance as tenth-rate powers. A certain permanent increase of expense, and no additional security, would therefore immediately accrue to them as well as to the mother-country, were they now to separate.

But what of the future? What will it be for England if she be isolated? The development of her manufactures within the present century has given her a population she cannot feed, and for whose support she has to send abroad from £80,000,000 to £80,000,000 per annum. The cost of living has rapidly become more expensive, and must continue to increase; so that it is very doubtful if England will be able permanently to keep her population up to its present number. It is evident she cannot do so unless her manufactures and trade continue as highly prosperous as they now are. Should they decline from any cause, such, for instance, as the gradual exhaustion of the supply of coal or iron, the inhabitants of this country must considerably diminish. They can never attain the number the United States will possess within the lifetime of men now living. For England to be separated from the rest of her Empire, will be to remain stationary, or comparatively so, while new countries grow up to and outstrip her in population, wealth, and power. The United States have gained considerably upon her within the last few years; their inhabitants, according to the last census, numbering thirty eight millions and a half.

Then, too, if the Colonies became independent, what figure would they present beside this great young power? When would Australia, great and populous as she is destined to become, attain a position of anything like equality with America? She has not yet two millions of inhabitants. In what century, then, could we expect the territories of the great transatlantic Republic to become so overcrowded that the rate of increase of population will be sufficiently checked to allow Australia to overtake America?

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stand in a position of equality beside the American Union, or any other great power: divided, neither England nor any of the Colonies, for generations, will be able to do so, and we must at no distant date resign the leadership of the Anglo-Saxon race to our American cousins. Far be it from us to think the growth of the United States a danger to us, or to regard them with the least jealousy. A laudable pride, however, would make us desire and strive that in the future ours shall be a great British Empire, which, if its union be cemented and power consolidated by means of some federal organisation, may be as strong and influential—a British union which shall never be the foe, but always the rival of the American Union in carrying forward that civilisation of the world which Providence seems to have destined the Anglo-Saxon race to accomplish. A French writer has said that the world of the future will be Anglo-Saxon. If so, it will be better that the race shall form two great nations than one first-class Power and a number of inferior States.

It must obviously be much more economical in the future for England and the Colonies to contribute fair proportions to the defences of a United Empire, than for each separately to maintain its own. The ships—though for years of little account as the navies of independent States—which the different groups of Colonies could contribute to that maritime force which would be the chief strength of the Empire, would, acting together and with the fleets of England, make up a mighty and irresistible navy, with which we should be able to keep the oceans of the world free for our commerce, and to prescribe peace upon them.

Another important economic consideration, to put it on the lowest ground, is that union will mean peace as well as strength; for the greater the number of independent states in the world, particularly if they be small ones, the more are the chances of war increased. So great a power as the Confederated Empire would become, would not be aggressive; it would be large enough not to covet its neighbours' dominions, and strong enough not to feel that weakness which sometimes makes nations go to war to test their strength, or to show they are not afraid to fight.

We are sometimes told that the persistence of some of the Colonies in the policy of protection will be fatal to our permanent union, and some indignation was expressed at the idea of the Australian Colonies wanting to adopt differential duties in each other's favour. It would be easy to conceive of a Federation, even had we no existing example of one in Switzerland, in which the provincial governments might confer exclusive privileges upon

local populations. Most objectionable as such a policy undoubtedly is, there is no reason to prevent the States in which it obtains from being united in a Federation. Continuance in union is more likely to lead to the removal of such invidious distinctions than separation, which must make them permanent and more numerous. Would it not also be better to recognise differences as to the truths of free-trade than quarrel about them? And if we can agree to continue united, and, for the purposes of mutual support, weld ourselves into an Empire in reality as well as in name, let us not think of disputing the right of the provincial legislatures to adjust their own revenues and manage their local affairs in their own way, without seeking to impose upon them, save by the force of conviction, a uniform free-trade policy. Were England to separate from the Colonies on account of protection, would they be as likely to adopt a wiser system than if she remain in union with them?

Adam Smith describes trade restrictions existing in his time, not only between these three kingdoms, but even between the people of England themselves, which were much more incompatible with the union of the same people under one central government than any restrictions imposed by Colonial tariffs. To say that people of the same State cannot remain united and impose taxes upon each other, is also opposed to present experience. On the Continent octroi duties are levied by towns, and free cities exist with exemptions from taxation not enjoyed by the rest of the State. But, however opposed to sound principles of political economy it may be thus to favour particular communities in the same State, there is nothing in doing so inconsistent with their being united under one government. Now, in principle, the taxation of imports from other parts of the Empire by the Government of any of its provinces, is similar to the foreign octroi, and the favour shown by some Colonies to their own productions is sufficiently analogous for my argument to the system of free cities or ports. Therefore, though strongly disapproving of protection, we should be unreasonable in our condemnation of it were we to hold that it must make all the difference between our permanent union being possible or impossible, desirable or undesirable.

The wish of contiguous Colonies to adopt differential duties in each other's favour is perfectly reasonable; and only the existence of protection could excite anything like hostility to the idea. It is extremely inconvenient for Colonies, like those of Australia, with artificial boundary lines hundreds of miles long, often in unpeopled regions, to keep up a strict custom-house system, and without desiring to make any distinction to the disadvantage of their fellow-

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subjects in other parts of the Empire, they may well seek to modify or abolish it, levying duties, whether free trade or protectionists, only upon imports from the seaboard. It is quite a different matter, and would be incompatible with the Imperial relation, to allow differential duties and reciprocity treaties between provinces of the Empire and governments outside it, whereby foreign goods should be admitted on terms more favourable than those extended to British trade.

In the preceding remarks I do not wish to make the least excuse for protection, to which I am everywhere most decidedly opposed.

Every available argument by which it is attempted to prove continued union with the Colonies undesirable for England, and many weighty reasons besides, may be applied with greater force to the possession of India. Indeed, Professor Goldwin Smith has declared the acquisition of that country to have been a mistake, and that its abandonment would be desirable, could England with honour free herself from the obligations she has contracted to govern it. And, certainly, India has been in the past, and is likely to prove in the future, a more fruitful source of danger and disaster to England than the Colonies ever were, or can possibly be.

Were the people of England and of the Colonies to be persuaded by those who counsel them, with arguments of fear or of avarice to abandon the Empire, Burke's famous hyperbolic sentence would become literally true of them—"the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever."

Having, as far as the space I can afford to that head of my subject will permit, touched upon the leading points showing that the permanent union of the Empire is desirable, and endeavoured to prove the objections to it to be unworthy and unreal, I shall now, as briefly as possible, consider what form of Imperial government will ultimately be indispensable. The more permanent bonds of union which will be required when the Colonies attain a more mature growth are still too little thought of by most reformers of Imperial relations, who continue considering what will be required for the short transition period between the infancy and maturity of the Colonies, forgetting that that period is rapidly passing away while they leisurely devise policies for it which, if ever matured, will never be needed.

That cannot be called statesmanship which would only deal with the Colonial question of the moment. It is time to think what may be required twenty, thirty, fifty years hence, and shape accordingly our policy. We may wisely determine what direction to take, and

steadily steer in it, even if the point for which we are bound be many a long day distant from us. The only ultimate goal for us, if the union of our Empire is to be real and lasting, is Federation. "Political inventiveness" may possibly produce new systems of government, but that is the only known form which can weld the Empire into one great power, giving all its people a voice in whatever policy concerns them, and utilising for their peace and security the great strength which, if solidified, they will be able to command.

Federation implies that there shall be a central Parliament and Executive of the Empire, like those of America, Germany, or Switzerland. This paper cannot be prolonged to examine the different forms of Federal Government. In my paper on "Imperial and Colonial Federalism," read at the Conference at the Westminster Palace Hotel, and published in the "Discussions on Colonial Questions," I have endeavoured to sketch out a system of Federation, the outlines of which are, I believe, capable of being filled in. I point out how a Parliament of the Empire might be elected, each Colony, or group of Colonies, having a due proportion of members chosen either by direct election or by its Parliament, and I express a decided preference for the former mode of selection.

The only obstacle suggested to our federal union not affecting existing Confederations, is that oceans would roll between its several portions, and that its extremities would be more remote than those of other Confederations. In reply it may be asked, Is the federal union of Canada with England impossible, because Canadian representatives would have to cross the Atlantic in steamers, whilst that of California with the United States is quite practicable, because representatives can make about an equally long journey by railway from San Francisco to Washington? And would the fact that the voyage from Australia to England takes six weeks or two months, instead of a week or fortnight, make all the difference between Federation being practicable and impracticable?

In fact, I believe that the separation of its territories by sea might even strengthen a federal union, by necessitating less interference with provincial self-government. For instance, the Western and Eastern States of America seriously differ about free-trade and protection; and both being on the same mainland, each cannot have the policy it prefers. Did a sea separate them they might have different tariffs, and thus a danger to the Confederation would be removed without its strength as a great power being impaired.

In his paper on the Colonies in the "Cobden Club Essays," Professor Thorold Rogers takes the same view of the objection of

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distance as that for which I now contend, and also in my paper on "Imperial and Colonial Federalism." Speaking of Colonial representation in the British Parliament, he says: "There is no difficulty in carrying out the project, because the Colony is distant from the seat of government;" and that Federation "would be undertaken if the British Parliament were less of a Chamber in which peddling interests were discussed and settled by compromise, and more of a Senate where great questions of policy were debated and determined." Professor Rogers, like many others, rejects the idea of Federation because he conceives it to mean representation of the Colonies in the British Parliament. And certainly they could expect but little benefit from having a few members in an Assembly which almost exclusively devotes itself to the provincial concerns of the United Kingdom, and in which really Imperial questions are liable to be decided by a count-out. To give all parts of the Empire a voice in its Government, a truly Imperial Parliament would have to be created: the present Parliament being left to occupy itself with the concerns of Great Britain and Ireland, which monopolise its attention and supply it with more business than it can conveniently get through. Representation of the Colonies in it could not be made sufficiently federal in its character unless the number of members of the House of Commons, already large enough, were increased, or those for the United Kingdom diminished, in order to make room for a due proportion of Colonial representatives. Neither would it be desirable that in those numerous questions exclusively affecting these kingdoms, any but their own representatives should take part. The only conceivable advantage of having a few members for the Colonies in the British Parliament would be that their presence would be an admission of the federal principle, and might demonstrate the necessity and stimulate the desire throughout the Empire for a complete Federation.

An Imperial Council like that for India is another expedient suggested by some who do not yet see their way to Federation. But of whatever value such an institution might for the present be, it would be perfectly inadequate as a permanent central governing body for the Empire. It could be entrusted with no powers of legislation or of raising an Imperial revenue; it would give the Colonies no such real voice in Imperial policy as that to which their increasing populations will render them entitled. In fact, the proposals to have Colonial representatives in Parliament, an Imperial Council, Colonial members of the Privy Council, and Secretaries of State sent by the Colonies to sit in the English cabinet, must all, however valuable they might be for a time, prove only

temporary expedients, not to be recommended, but as means to produce something much more complete and permanent. Their existence would soon demonstrate their own insufficiency; and the only good to be hoped from them would be that they might assist to create and then make way for a real federal organisation.

From the list of possible suggestions just referred to, I think the proposal should be excluded that the Colonies should have in this country representatives similar to the ambassadors sent by Foreign Powers. As one born and brought up in the Colonies, I should strongly object to anything sounding and looking so like Colonial independence. May the most marked distinction ever exist between foreign ministers and the representatives of the Colonies in this country, whatever may be their status!

It may perhaps be said, How can we expect Colonies to agree to the greater scheme of Confederation with the mother-country and the rest of the Empire, when their jealousies prevent them from forming federal unions among themselves? Canada would not have united herself in a confederation had she not felt the need of that strength which union alone could give her; Australia, not so urgently feeling the want of a federal government, does not seem inclined to form one, though it would be of undoubted advantage to her. The objection seems to me capable of being more briefly answered than stated. Confederation implies a certain amount of concession, and young communities may resolutely refuse to give way to each other, though they would not have the slightest hesitation in yielding precedence to the old country; so that really it would probably be more easy to form an Imperial than an inter-Colonial Confederation. Besides, the Colonies would feel that it would add to their prestige to be taken into council, to be admitted to a share with the old country in the government of the Empire.

Imperial Federalism and Irish Home-Rule are in no way necessarily connected. In fact, I am decidedly opposed to the latter—a question with which, however, the inhabitants of the United Kingdom should alone be left to deal.

The whole sum of the matter seems to be, that the maintenance of the unity of the Empire is desirable, and consequently a central government will be required to represent all its portions, giving each that weight which, from its importance and the share it will take in the defence of the Empire, shall be its due in all Imperial questions, such as peace, war, defence, foreign affairs, and the laws of naturalisation, domicile, and marriage. If this is to be effected, our children, if not ourselves, must see the establishment of a real Federation with a Parliament and Executive as distinct from

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and superior to those of England and of the different Colonies as the new Legislature and Government of United Germany are distinct from and superior to the Chambers and Ministries of Prussia and Bavaria, or the federal governments of the American Union or of Switzerland are distinct from and superior to those of the States or Cantons of which these confederations are respectively composed. Such a federal government need not interfere with the present full and free control of the provincial governments over local affairs. We should not perhaps at first attempt to set up a very complete federal government. Our object may probably be best reached by beginning with the simplest form of Federation we can devise—perhaps one of those systems which I have spoken of as temporary expedients—always keeping in view and moving forward towards something more perfect ; for the history of federalism in America, Germany, and Switzerland, where it has had as many and greater difficulties to surmount as any it will with us have to encounter, shows that the tendency of the system when once it is planted is to take root, grow, and ripen into greater perfection. Its introduction among us would assuredly create throughout our Empire an enthusiasm for and loyalty to our union, as strong as that of Americans for theirs, when it became apparent to what a position Federation would elevate both England and the Colonies, what strength, what greatness, what security, what peace it would, with the blessing of God, ensure us. Proud as we all are of the glorious old Union Jack, of being British subjects, how much more proud might we justly be could we regard that flag as the emblem of a still greater union, could we call ourselves citizens of a still greater British Empire, of an Imperial Confederation of which the Sovereign of England should be Empress or Emperor.

I have endeavoured to give a slight sketch of a question upon which many volumes might be written and spoken. Confederation is, I believe, a perfectly practicable policy for the future, if we only maintain and develop throughout the Empire the strong Imperial spirit and warm affection for the great principle of unity, of which we find in various quarters so many happy indications. Without Confederation I cannot conceive how we can ultimately get on ; how we can give our new and rising communities the voice in Imperial affairs to which a few years' additional growth will entitle them ; how we can combine our defences and utilise our strength as one great united Power. The Federalists alone show how all this can be effected ; they, and they only, have a clear, definite, and satisfactory policy for the future. Those who reject that policy suggest positively nothing instead. They can see their way

for no distance before them, and can only hope that out of the mist in which they are involved, they may, somehow or other, stumble upon a right track.

In the region of politics this question towers immeasurably above all others in importance and grandeur; it is the greatest which statesmanship can ever touch. Upon its skilful handling depends nothing less than the momentous issue whether, within a century, the greatest Empire the world can ever see shall be made or marred. The thought is supremely impressive. In its presence all petty provincialisms, strifes, jealousies, party differences should shrink into fitting insignificance. England by an unhappy policy lost her first Colonies; she has now a second great opportunity, such as never before fell to the lot of a nation, and certainly can never occur again, of permanently fixing her borders far beyond her narrow sea-girt isles, and incorporating in indissoluble union with these ancient kingdoms, vast new dominions in various climes and in different hemispheres.

Seeing, then, that the question of its permanent unity is of such vital importance to our whole British race, it is time to think of and form some definite ideas and plans for its future organisation. Nothing could be more practical. Only on the most superficial, shallow view of the question can it be said not to be so, or that we ought to postpone beginning to think of it. Postpone, indeed, considering this question, with Canada progressing as she is, with Australia almost doubling her population in a dozen years, with South Africa advancing with increasing speed, with the whole Empire growing so rapidly that only in the eloquent language of the famous Burke can we find words to describe its progress: "Fiction lags after truth; invention is unfruitful, and imagination cold and barren;" and in another passage: "For my part, I never cast an eye on their flourishing commerce, and their cultivated and commodious life, but they seem to me to be rather ancient nations grown to perfection through a long series of fortunate events, and a train of successful industry, accumulating wealth in many centuries, than the Colonies of yesterday."

That great statesman, and perhaps greatest of orators, whose words are even more descriptive of our present circumstances than they were of those to which he applied them, may be said to have been the father of the great principle of Imperial unity, which his immortal speeches unmistakably breathe forth. Those who reflect so little on the progress of the past, and have so far failed to learn from it the lessons it should teach respecting the future, as to tell us it is too soon to speak and think about Imperial organisa-

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tion, should study Burke's grand picture of the progress of the British Empire of his time, in which he describes how the commerce of England to her Colonies alone had grown in 1772 to £8,509,000, only £485,000 less than the whole export trade of England in 1704.

With as much truth as eloquence Burke spoke of this sixty-eight years of the progress of England and her Colonies. How, were he now living, would he describe the much greater progress of a much shorter period? How would he speak of the sure development of the next few years? What a theme the permanent unity of our present Empire would be for him! How his eloquent voice would be raised against the ignoble idea of disintegration! How it would arouse those who sleep over, and leave unthought of, the great question—How our future union can best be organised?

I must, in conclusion, expressly guard myself against the charge of wishing to see Confederation forced on before its time,—and upon this point I believe all Imperial Federalists are agreed. Nothing is further from our desire; few things could be more fatal to our object. We do not think of plucking the fruit before it is ripe; but we do want this question, and the public opinion of the Empire respecting it, to grow and ripen in due season, under the healthy and maturing influences of timely consideration and discussion. May the Author of all peace and goodwill bless and preserve the unity of the people of our Empire.
